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ABSTRACT

This research synthesis reviews the negative effects of teacher stress, focusing on teachers in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific. It describes teaching techniques for reducing these detrimental effects and discusses the relevance of such techniques within the cultures of the Pacific region. Section 1 describes what stress is. Section 2 examines the negative effects of teacher stress, including attrition and absenteeism. Section 3 presents effective strategies for dealing with workplace stress, including stress awareness; physiological coping strategies training (e.g., biofeedback, muscle relaxation, meditation, breathing techniques, and aerobic activity); environmental adjustment; and mind control. Section 4 looks at the effects of stress management programs. Section 5 examines the role of culture in stress. Section 6 looks at stress and the culturally diverse teaching staff, focusing on the Pacific perspectives. Section 7 discusses the implications for Pacific educators. Section 8 concludes with some recommendations for improvement (e.g., involve traditional support systems, adapt effective strategies and activities, and create cultural induction programs for new teachers). (Contains 65 references.) (SM)

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By Zoe Ann Brown and
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November 1999

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> Teaching can be a stressful occupation. The daily interactions with students and coworkers and the incessant and fragmented demands of teaching often lead to overwhelming pressures and challenges, which may lead to stress. Where work stress is unrelenting, some negative physiological, psychological, and behavioral consequences may result. (DeRobbio & Iwanicki, 1996, p. 1)

Many teachers would agree. Teaching is not only hard work, it can be full of stress. Pressure due to school reform efforts, inadequate administrative support, poor working conditions, lack of participation in school decision making, the burden of paperwork, and lack of resources have all been identified as factors that can cause stress among school staff (Hammond & Onikama, 1997).

In the multicultural Pacific region, contact between cultures could be a cause of workplace stress. For teachers who move into unfamiliar cultures, acculturative stress can cause lowered mental health (e.g., confusion, anxiety, depression) and feelings of alienation; those who feel marginalized can become highly stressed (Berry, 1990). Teachers from very different cultures might neither understand nor appreciate the cultural differences of the communities in which they are placed. Since novice teachers are often reluctant to ask for help, they may be afraid to let anyone know that they are having problems in the classroom. This could then lead to additional stress, which eventually leads to high absenteeism and attrition. Those who are recruited thousands of miles away from family and friends may have inadequate social networks to provide the social support that is critical for worker health.

The purpose of this synthesis is to review the negative effects of teacher stress, with particular attention to teachers in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific; describe techniques for reducing these detrimental effects; and discuss the relevance of such techniques within the cultures of the Pacific region.

What is stress?

The research literature acknowledges difficulty in pinpointing a single definition of the term *stress*. A frequently cited definition of *stress* has been provided by Selye (1974): "the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it" (p. 27). The term has been further defined by Gold and Roth (1993): "a condition of disequilibrium within the intellectual, emotional and physical state of the individual; it is generated by one's perceptions of a situation, which result in physical and emotional reactions. It can be either positive or negative, depending upon one's interpretations" (p. 17).

Teacher stress is defined by Kyriacou (1987) as "the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger, and depression, resulting from aspects of work as a teacher" (p. 146).

Teacher burnout is defined by Kyriacou (1987) as "the syndrome resulting from prolonged teacher stress, primarily characterized by physical, emotional and attitudinal exhaustion" (p. 146).

What are the negative effects of teacher stress?

Attrition

High stress can cause teachers to leave the profession.

Stress has been identified as one of the factors related to teacher attrition and is believed to be a cause of high teacher turnover and absenteeism in parts of the Pacific (Hammond & Onikama, 1997). The Retention and Attrition of Pacific School Teachers and Administrators (RAPSTA) studies (1998), conducted by PREL's Research and Development (R&D) Cadre in the ten U.S.-affiliated Pacific island groups, addressed these factors among Pacific educators. Teachers in American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)—Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap—Guam, Hawai'i, the Republic of Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands answered questionnaires regarding their days away from school, their desire to leave teaching, and their reasons for leaving the profession. They also rated themselves on workplace stress using a modified version of the 22-item Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)—Educators Survey (Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1986).

Results of these studies indicate that in seven of the ten locations, teachers who said they might leave teaching within the next two years experienced higher degrees of stress and burnout than their non-leaving peers (Pacific Resources for Education and Learning R&D Cadre, 1998). These "potential leavers" displayed more emotional exhaustion, greater feelings of depersonalization, and less personal accomplishment in their jobs.

These findings are corroborated by research conducted by Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979), who acknowledged that the intention to leave teaching is associated with teacher stress. Unfortunately, high teacher turnover has a negative effect on student achievement (Walberg, 1974).

In the CNMI Public School System, located 2,500 miles across the Pacific Ocean from Hawai'i, a yearly teacher attrition rate of 23 percent requires a half-million dollar annual recruitment budget. With 60 percent of new teachers in CNMI coming from the continental U.S.—more than 5,000 miles away—attri-

tion is a very costly matter (PREL R&D Cadre, 1998). Workplace stress might play a part in these high attrition rates. Indeed, people from the U.S. Mainland who are teaching in CNMI display significantly more stress and are more likely to report that they might leave teaching within the next two years, compared to Pacific-born teachers in CNMI. In the State of Hawai'i, where there is a continually low supply of teachers from local universities, the pattern is similar, with non-Pacific born teachers more likely to leave teaching as well as have higher levels of stress.

Stress is one of the many reasons teachers leave their jobs; unfortunately, our schools cannot find sufficient replacements and currently face severe teacher shortages.

Stress is one of the many reasons teachers leave their jobs; unfortunately, our schools often cannot find sufficient replacements and frequently face severe teacher shortages. Across the nation, one out of every five full-time teachers leaves the teaching profession to pursue a career outside the education field (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). The geographical isolation of the Pacific hinders recruitment efforts, and limited resources restrict institutions of higher education from preparing sufficient numbers of teachers to staff schools throughout the region.

Given the challenges of geography and limited availability of locally prepared teachers in the Pacific region, retaining trained teachers is of critical importance. Preventing teacher attrition is an educational and economic necessity.

Absenteeism

Stress can lead to illness and absenteeism.

Stress can lead to problems in the workplace, such as poor morale, job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, lowered productivity, and high medical care costs (Kedjidjian, 1995). Job satisfaction is negatively related to teacher absenteeism (Pellicer, 1984; Scott & Winbush, 1991). "At the school level the increase in stress is reflected in a growing average annual days of teacher absences and a rise in the number of early retirements" (Gaziel, 1993, p. 77).

Work-related stress accounts for many workers' compensation and disability claims. Teachers in particular represent a large proportion of work-related stress claims (WorkCover Western Australia, 1998). These claims cost school systems billions of dollars in medical costs, substitute teachers, and disability payments.

In many Pacific islands, high teacher absenteeism is a primary concern. Many parents and students feel that student academic difficulties are due, in part, to frequent teacher absenteeism (Pacific Region Educational Laboratory R&D Cadre, 1995a; 1995b; 1995c). Research on the continental U.S. indicates that higher teacher absenteeism is related to lower student outcomes (Madden, Flanigan, & Richardson, 1991; Pitkoff, 1993; Ballou, 1996; Woods &

Montagno, 1997). Citing analyses from the *1990 Schools and Staffing Survey*, Ballou (1996) reports that "...absenteeism increases with higher percentages of poor and minority students. Thus, absenteeism is worst in precisely those schools that can least afford the loss of services of regular teachers" (p. 6).

"When a qualified educator is absent from the classroom, student achievement is negatively affected." Woods & Montagno, 1997

In Pacific entities where substitute teachers are available, lower student achievement can result from substitute teachers who are "significantly less effective in classrooms than the regular teachers" (Manlove & Elliott, 1979). In entities where substitutes are not available (e.g., Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands), students might not attend school because a teacher is not present to teach them. Thus, valuable instructional opportunities and learning time are lost.

Teacher stress is significantly correlated with the total number of days that teachers are away from school.

The importance of teachers' school attendance is clear. Unfortunately, workplace stress could be one reason for the high number of days away from work that are reported by many Pacific teachers. Results of the RAPSTA studies indicate that, across all entities, the average number of days away from school during school year 1996-97 was 11, with a range from 5 to 22. This is significantly higher than the U.S. national average of seven sick and personal leave days per teacher each year (Freeman & Grant, 1987). While the exact causes of absenteeism have not been pinpointed, it is known that in most of the entities, there is a significant positive correlation between teacher stress and the total number of days that teachers are away from school.

What are effective strategies for dealing with workplace stress?

Studies have examined various sources and consequences of workplace stress. To a lesser extent, they have covered strategies for coping with it. While many studies have evaluated worksite stress-reduction programs, few examine stress management specifically for educational personnel. Even fewer examine issues of stress and burnout in the Pacific region.

Most research on stress prevention has been conducted in the health and human services areas, since work-related stress is very prevalent in these assistance professions. Therefore, this synthesis is based primarily on those studies conducted in the fields of psychology and other healing professions, with a few from the field of education. Regardless of clientele, these successful stress-reduction programs include strategies that could be applicable to teachers and other educational personnel in the Pacific.

Through review of these studies, several major strategies were identified as successful in coping with stress and burnout: stress awareness, physiological training, environment adjustment, and mind control.

Stress Awareness

Awareness is the first step.

Stress-management research conducted by Cahill and Feldman (1988); Bunce and West (1996); Ganster, Mayes, Sime, and Tharp (1982); Reynolds, Taylor, and Shapiro (1993); Forman (1981); Higgins (1986); Pines and Aronson (1983); and, to a lesser extent, Milstein and Golaszewski (1985); and Long (1988) found that many successful intervention programs begin by building participants' *knowledge and awareness of stress and burnout*. Awareness sessions presented in a non-threatening environment provide participants with updated information about the nature, signs, causes, and symptoms of stress. For example, one stress-management training program for school psychologists focuses on the definition of stress, the causes of stress in schools, the frequency of stress, and the effects of stress on students and teachers (Forman, 1981).

Following an initial awareness presentation, a more active and participatory component of stress management is often provided to help participants determine, identify, and understand the origins of stress. Topics include how to:

- Recognize stress-producing work events and the corresponding thoughts that they provoke (stressors);
- Become aware of the effects of such thoughts on one's physiological and emotional responses;
- Recognize these physiological and emotional responses as manifestations of stress;
- Systematically evaluate the objective consequences of stress-producing events at work; and
- Replace self-defeating thoughts that invoke stress.

Once causes of stress have been recognized and identified, preventative measures can be taken. Bunce and West (1996) demonstrated that participants can become empowered through various stress-management activities. After helping employees identify primary stressors, employers can provide training in counseling skills so that staff members are able to offer support and guidance to colleagues who are facing difficulties at work.

Physiological Training

Get physical!

Most successful stress-prevention programs also provide training in *physiological coping strategies* such as the following:

- Biofeedback—Electronic measurement of mind-body functions (muscle tension, intestinal activity, blood flow, breathing, heartbeat) and techniques to control those functions.

- Muscle relaxation—Self-regulated, progressive body relaxation that puts the respondent in an extremely restful state.

- Focused meditation—Perhaps the oldest of all mind-body techniques. There are many meditation techniques; the most current and popular form involves focusing on a "mantra" (single word, number, or phrase) for about 15 to 20 minutes.

- Breathing techniques—Learning how to breathe for relaxation purposes; typically combined with other coping strategies. Simple exercises include closing one's eyes; counting backwards from ten to one; inhaling while saying to oneself, "I am...," and exhaling while saying "...calm and relaxed."

- Aerobic activity—Any type of activity that raises the level of one's pulse rate. Suggested exercises include bicycling, swimming, or jogging.

Ganster, Mayes, Sime, and Tharp (1982); Bruning and Frew (1987); Reynolds, Taylor, and Shapiro (1993); Milstein and Golaszewski (1985); Cooley and Yovanoff (1996); Forman (1981); Kagan, Kagan, and Watson (1995); and Higgins (1986) emphasize the importance of physiological training in stress management. These techniques are effective when combined with other stress-management strategies.

Research by Murphy (1983) suggests that biofeedback and muscle relaxation are effective as part of a work-based stress-management program. In a study of nurses under stress, one experimental group received biofeedback, another received training in progressive muscle relaxation, and a control group received self-relaxation training. After three months, the biofeedback group reported increased work energy levels, and the muscle relaxation group noted a greater ability to cope with stress. Both experimental groups reported successful results more frequently than the control group. In addition, all three groups reported decreased anxiety levels and improved sleep. The results demonstrate that both biofeedback and muscle relaxation are effective relaxation strategies.

Environmental Adjustment

Change the situation and reactions to it.

Another major component of successful stress-prevention programs is the development of *situational coping strategies*. Participants are trained in strategies that help them either change their reaction to specific stressful situations or alter their work environment.

Participants learn:

- Assertiveness techniques
- Tools for enlisting the cooperation of others
- Skills for changing a stressful situation

Landsbergis and Vivona-Vaughn (1995) evaluated an intervention designed to reduce work-related stress in a large and growing public health agency. During a series of meetings with a facilitator, participants discussed their stressors; developed proposals and action plans to reduce the stressors; provided feedback to the other employees; and encouraged and assisted management in implementing change to decrease stressful work-based situations.

Belief that the work environment is a causal factor that contributes to teachers' stress was supported by the action research of Milstein and Golaszewski (1985). They identified an effective, three-phase organizational intervention for reducing stress: teachers and administrators clarify specific stress related issues at school; cooperatively establish specific goals; and develop and implement strategies to alleviate or modify structures, processes, and behaviors.

In a longitudinal field experiment designed to examine the relative effectiveness of three stress intervention strategies, Bruning and Frew (1987) explored work ethics and personal values. They examined the importance of setting strategic and tactical goals, seeking collaboration of co-workers, and identifying barriers.

Golembiewski, Hilles, and Daly (1987) studied an organizational intervention for human resources staff who became involved in their own stress diagnosis and treatment. Program features include the following activities: (a) listing three things that staff like about their department; (b) listing three "concerns" that they want to change; and (c) discussing the concerns. These steps then resulted in confronting their supervisor with the concerns, and developing—through consensus—a career progression plan for the company.

Mind Control

Use the mind to control emotions.

In addition to training participants in physiological and/or situational coping strategies, the experiments of Bruning and Frew (1987); Reynolds, Taylor, and Shapiro (1993); Forman (1981); Higgins (1986); Cooley and Yovanoff (1996); and Pines and Aronson (1983) emphasized the importance of cognitive appraisal and re-appraisal. Strategies for changing how one thinks about stressful or stress-producing situations, i.e., *cognitive coping strategies*, are an important component that leads to the reduction or prevention of stress.

Training focuses on several mental techniques:

- Replacing self-defeating, self-limiting beliefs with more constructive, realistic, and empowering ones: learning how to recognize self-doubt in order to coach oneself into changing these thoughts.

- Identifying barriers: examining personal values, both work- and non-work related, and setting goals. Through this technique, roadblocks are identified. With training in other techniques such as time management, barriers can be overcome.

- Improving time management and goal setting /prioritization skills: keeping track of how one spends time and adjusting behavior to match identified goals. Activities such as To Do lists, weekly schedules, and six-month planning calendars help participants focus energy and combat procrastination.

- Using problem-solving techniques: encouraging participants to analyze, understand, and deal with problem situations rather than avoiding them, blaming others, or feeling helpless.

- Handling emotions: looking closely at how emotions such as frustration, anxiety, and fear contribute to ineffective coping strategies; and allowing participants to reassess their feelings and "re-write" effective responses. These constructed responses provide cognitive, emotional, and behavioral tools that can be used during stressful situations.

- Dealing with life changes: developing counseling skills among participants in order to help colleagues deal with stressful events. This includes developing communication skills such as listening and empathy; actively listening as well as communicating ones' thoughts effectively; and clarifying one's personal feelings.

Training includes lessons in identifying irrational beliefs and discriminating between things that can and cannot be changed. Skills for changing how one thinks about a situation are an essential part of many interventions.

What are the effects of stress-management programs?

Evaluative studies of intervention programs have a variety of outcomes for stress management and/or reduction. Both long- and short-term effects were noted. Overall results include:

- Improved peer support
- Reduced levels of somatic complaints
- Enhanced feelings of personal accomplishment
- Decreased work pressure and role ambiguity
- Improved job satisfaction

While the majority of the studies showed positive effects, several authors mentioned the need for follow-up, long-term evaluation. One study collected data a year after the intervention and found that improvements had regressed to initial levels (Bunce & West, 1996). Another study (Golembiewski, Hilles, & Daly, 1987) showed that initial improvement faded somewhat one year after the program was completed. These results highlight the necessity of using methods that maintain intervention impact over an extended period of time.

Ganster, Mayes, Sime, and Tharp (1982) emphasized the importance of using specialized trainers in the interventions. For their study, a clinical psychologist and an exercise and stress physiologist conducted the trainings. The effectiveness of their program when implemented by less specialized trainers is unknown.

What role does culture play in stress?

Educators in the Pacific region represent an array of cultural backgrounds.

Educators in the Pacific region represent an array of cultural backgrounds. The RAPSTA studies (PREL R&D Cadre, 1998) identified more than 30 different ethnic backgrounds among teachers in the ten U.S.-affiliated Pacific island groups. These include both indigenous, immigrant, and Western cultures. Does cultural/ethnic background play a role in occupational stress in the Pacific?

"Clearly, the ethnocultural background of a worker has a profound impact upon the entire spectrum of work-related behavior" (Marsella, 1997, p.38). Hui (1990) suggests that cultural values make up the basic foundation of job satisfaction.

Cultural values determine worker values that in turn influence job expectations, outcomes, and satisfaction. Gaziel (1993) asserts that cultural factors have an impact on both the perception of occupational stress and the strategies that individuals choose for coping with stress.

Cultural values determine worker values that in turn influence job expectations, outcomes, and satisfaction.

One way to categorize cultural differences in work values is *individualism vs. collectivism*. Individualistic societies are often characterized as modern, fast-paced, and competitive; its members value individual initiative, achievement, autonomy, financial security, and individual decision-making skills (Hofstede, 1980). Westerners, and Americans in particular, are often characterized as individualistic, self-centered, and hedonistic (Hui, 1990), giving priority to independence and highly individualized skills and qualities. Pressure to achieve these ideals can be very stressful. On the other hand, collective societies value family integrity and interdependence. Group goals have priority over individual goals; harmony and saving face are important; family achievement is emphasized. Members of collective cultures respect those in authority or with higher status. They are modest, humble, and committed to social relationships and obligations. In these cultures, considerable emphasis is placed on developing sensitivity to others' feelings and needs. Many East Asian, Southern, and Pacific cultures are characterized as collective. Approximately 70 percent of the world's cultures could be described as collective (Triandis, 1989). Collective cultural ideals support harmony rather than competition, unity rather than separation, calmness rather than anxiety.

Stress is a learned perception that appears to be culturally based.

Therefore, if occupational stress does exist in the Pacific, "less stress is perceived due to culturally mediating factors, such as social support found in collective cultures" (Triandis, 1990). Although the physiological underpinnings of stress are universal, stress is generated by one's perceptions of a situation. Stress is a learned perception that appears to be culturally based. Individuals raised in collective cultures learn to alleviate stressors by seeking social support. The emphasis on social relationships leads to strong social support systems (family, friends, clan, tribe, church), which serve as buffers to help members cope with difficult events, circumstances, and situations.

Research confirms that low levels of social support are associated with psychological distress.

Research confirms that low levels of social support are associated with psychological distress (Abdel-Halim, 1982; Andrews, Tennant, Hewson, & Vaillant, 1978; Dean & Lin, 1977; Eaton, 1978; Etzion, 1984; Fusilier, Ganster, & Mayes, 1987; Kirmeyer & Dougherty, 1988; Kobasa & Puccetti, 1983; Lin, Simeone, Ensel, & Kuo, 1979; Seers, McGee, Serey, & Graen, 1983). Research in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific entities also supports this relationship: In general, educa-

tors in all ten Pacific entities experienced less occupational stress and burnout, as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Jackson, & Schwab, 1986), than educators in the continental U.S. (PREL R&D Cadre, 1998). Lower stress levels could be due, in part, to the strong social networks that permeate Pacific cultures. Thus, a culture's individualism or collectivism impacts the perception of occupational stress and also the choices of strategies for coping with it (Gaziel, 1993).

In collective cultures, public disagreements are discouraged.

Most stress-prevention and stress-reduction programs have been developed for Western societies. One direct approach that helps individuals improve their situational coping skills includes assertiveness training, which encourages workers to confront their superiors about their concerns.

This approach, while apparently appropriate and effective for members of individualistic cultures, is less effective and is certainly inappropriate in collective cultures, where harmony and saving face are more important than confrontation. In these cultures, public disagreements are discouraged, and members prefer to solve conflicts amicably (Leung, 1987). Gallimore, Boggs, and Jordan (1974) described Native Hawaiians as developing "sensitive communication skills and avoidance of direct confrontation" (p. 163). In Micronesia, the common way to deal with interpersonal problems is "by withdrawal rather than confrontation" (Hezel, 1996, p. 5). Conklin reported the following:

> Within the restrictive confines of the small island communities, residents developed patterns of behavior that reduced direct confrontation and permitted harmonious living together. The Micronesians are well-known for avoidance of confrontation and disagreement, for indirect modes of interacting, for the high value that they place on face and dignity. While the specific behaviors and their relative articulation vary from culture to culture, putting oneself forward, directly challenging or demeaning another, and disturbance of consensus are generally negatively valued. (Conklin, 1984, p. 19)

Stress and the culturally diverse teaching staff: Pacific perspectives

As a result of the effect that culture has on stress, Western researchers and psychologists have had difficulty understanding the nature of stress in culturally diverse populations—the conditions under which stress exists, and effective and culturally appropriate strategies for coping with stress.

The importance of ethnocultural variation in perceptions of stress should not be ignored.

> Most of the theory, research and measurement of work behavior has been generated in North America and Europe. While it is true that these societies differ from one another in many ways, it is also true that similarities among these societies have assured that ideas and techniques developed in one society often have direct application to another. That is to say, there is "equivalency." However, when these ideas and techniques are applied uncritically to non-Western societies, a number of questions can be raised about the validity of these actions. This is because concepts of work, concepts of "personhood," and concepts of health and well-being and their measurement are likely to be ethnocentric. By ethnocentric, the author means that the concepts and methods of measurement may have only limited cross-cultural relevancy because they do not consider the experience of people from different cultural traditions...The importance of ethnocultural variation in emotional reactions to work requires careful consideration...[so as not to] distort the nature of phenomena from the viewpoint of indigenous people. (Marsella, 1994)

Stress might manifest itself differently in the Pacific.

Thus, stress in the Pacific might manifest itself differently than stress in the continental United States. Indeed, from discussion with Pacific educators, it appears that there is no universal understanding of stress. In many Pacific languages, there is either no word for stress, or there are conflicting ideas of what stress is. Terms exist for *tired, fatigued, sick,* and *exhausted,* but none have the same meaning as *stress.* The concept of stress as it relates to Pacific educators is quite uncommon. Rather, stress is often perceived as pressure felt as the result of familial obligations and responsibilities, which are reasons frequently given for stress and absenteeism among educators in the region. These duties often require teachers to miss school, and stresses associated with complying with family and community responsibilities can affect work. Although Galinsky, as cited in Marsella (1997) concluded that work stress affects family life more than family problems affect work, this might not be accurate in many Pacific cultures.

Cultural factors influence perceptions of stress and ways of coping with it.

Cultural factors influence Pacific teachers' perception of stress and choice of coping strategies. In particular, several cultures do not believe that people have control over illnesses and disease prevention. In cultures with a high "external" locus of control, individuals often believe that they have little control over their problems, and that events in their lives are influenced by other people or by circumstances beyond their control (Rotter, 1966). They might feel like victims of a capricious and unpredictable environment where luck, fate, or chance is believed to be responsible for solving problems or healing illnesses.

The dominant role of religion throughout the Pacific underscores the importance of external forces (i.e., a Supreme Being) in the lives of individuals. The ecology (resources, climate, and geography) of the former Trust Territories of the Pacific and their history of successive colonization by different countries certainly influenced culture, which in turn influenced the people's beliefs about their own role in controlling life events (Triandis, 1990).

The acceptance of life's stressful events could be an effective coping strategy. As Goldberger and Breznitz (1993) explained:

> Many workers in the field make the value judgment…that an internal locus of control is preferable to an external one; they argue that self-control can be used effectively to combat the potentially deleterious effects of stress. However, many critical stressors do not leave room for control, and passive acceptance may be the most appropriate coping strategy in such situations. (p. 5)

What are the implications for Pacific educators?

In this synthesis, the authors examined research on successful stress-prevention programs and discussed relevant cultural factors that apply to teachers in diverse contexts of the U.S.-affiliated Pacific. This review permits the following conclusions to be drawn:

1. Workplace stress and burnout can lead to teacher absenteeism and attrition.

2. High rates of teacher turnover are negatively associated with student achievement.

3. Teacher absenteeism might affect student achievement.

4. Teacher absenteeism is higher in the Pacific region than across the continental United States.

5. In the Pacific region, teacher stress is significantly correlated with the number of days that teachers are away from school.

6. In the Pacific region, teachers who report that they might leave teaching also report higher stress and teacher burnout than their non-leaving peers. This is especially true among U.S. teachers working far away from home.

7. Difficulties due to geography and limited access to higher education opportunities in the Pacific region make teacher retention a critical concern.

8. As workplace stress and burnout are relatively new concepts in the United States, only a few empirically based stress-management intervention programs are available for review; most programs focus on non-educators from predominantly Western cultures.

9. Successful stress-management programs include awareness and training in cognitive, physiological, and situational coping strategies.

10. Perceptions of workplace stress, as well as strategies for coping with it, can vary due to cultural factors.

11. Cultural context (e.g., the society in which a school is located, cultural backgrounds of teachers) should be considered before designing stress-management programs in culturally diverse locations.

What are some recommendations for improvement?

Based on these conclusions, the following suggestions can help ensure cultural appropriateness when adapting effective stress-management programs for the Pacific region. While workplace stress is not as prevalent in the Pacific as it is on the continental U.S., island teachers who are considering leaving the profession show signs of occupational stress and burnout. In particular, teachers who are recruited from the continental U.S. to teach in Hawai'i and the CNMI are more likely to report higher levels of workplace stress and more days away from school.

Moreover, stress from other sources (e.g., familial obligations) can carry over into the workplace. Stress, regardless of its source, can be alleviated through culturally relevant programs. In the Pacific, there is a need to design culturally appropriate stress-management programs for educators.

Involve traditional support systems.

Clan elders, clergy, and extended family members serve as the social support system throughout the Pacific. These important leaders should be involved in designing culturally appropriate stress-management programs, because they have the support of the community and understand how best to reach its members.

Adapt effective strategies and activities.

Collaboration and cooperation are important aspects of Pacific cultures. Strategies that build on harmony and focus on positive interpersonal relationships while acknowledging status relationships and obligations are more effective in the Pacific than the direct, open discussion and confrontation approaches characteristic of the continental U.S.

For example, while face-to-face confrontation is often not a culturally appropriate technique to alleviate stress in the Pacific, the use of a third party or intermediary is frequently effective in resolving conflict. Rather than confronting the principal one-on-one, a teacher might express personal feelings to a staff member who has a close relationship with the administrator. That co-worker will then relay the message to the principal, and resolution hopefully progresses from there. It is important that the mediator is the "right" person. For example, in a matrilineal society, a female is sent to mediate conflicts between teacher and principal.

Create cultural induction programs for new teachers, including cross-cultural training activities.

In entities where induction programs exist, the current programs might not provide adequate guidance or sufficiently prepare teachers for the stresses associated with relocation and cultural adjustment. Teacher induction programs would benefit from following cross-cultural communication training models provided to foreign students and workers prior to emigration (Brislin, Cushner, Cherrie, & Yong, 1986). Teacher induction programs could include training activities that highlight cross-cultural awareness, such as intercultural communication, cross-cultural adjustment, culture learning, and unfamiliar socialization practices (Paige, 1990).

In addition, for teachers employed far away from home and family, opportunities for group interaction can offer much-needed assistance. A network of groups—both social and professional—can support teachers in coping with acculturation.

The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Teacher Induction Study (Moskowitz & Stephens, 1997) surveyed 11 Pacific Rim countries and asked what each did to ease the transition for beginning teachers. Findings showed that these programs function within a culture of shared responsibility and in an environment where all professionals take active roles in a new teacher's acculturation and transition. Mentoring, modeling good teacher practice, and providing orientations and in-service training are parts of a multi-faceted approach.

Recognize that the collective orientation of the Pacific is a strength. The collective nature of Pacific cultures mitigate many of the negative effects of stress commonly found in the workplace.

The collective nature of Pacific cultures provides social supports and a strong basis for building positive interpersonal relationships; these mitigate many of the negative effects of workplace stress found throughout Western cultures. Focusing on harmony and interdependence, these societies foster collaboration and cooperation rather than competition and confrontation. There is much to be learned from these cultures, especially when assisting educators in performing to the best of their abilities.

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